

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ACCRA 00389 191243Z

ACTION EB-07

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FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA

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SUBJ: PAN AMERICAN SERVICE

REF: A. 76 ACCRA 6208 (NOTAL), B. MONROVIA 0061 (NOTAL)

1. REFTEL A OUTLINED SOME OF THIS POST'S PROBLEMS WITH PANAM AND MEETING HELD WITH PANAM MGR. TO ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE. REFTEL B DETAILED MAJOR MONROVIE PROBLEMS WITH PANAM.

2. IN BRIEF, OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND OTHER NATIONAL HAVE LONG COLLECTION OF PANAM HORROR STORIES, AND CLEARLY USE PANAM ONLY WHEN NO ALTERNATIVE AVAILABLE. COMPLAINTS RANGE ENTIRE GAMUT FROM ILL-INFORMED AND SURLY RESERVATION CLERKS ALL UP AND DOWN THE PANAM ROUTE, INCORRECT FARE CONSTRUCTIONS, UNHELPFUL AND OCCASIONALLY RUDE PERSONNEL AT CHECK-IN COUNTERS (NOTABLY BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY AT KENNEDY AIRPORT), LACK OF INTEREST IN AND SERVICE TO PASSENGERS WHO MISS CONNECTIONS OR ARE OTHERWISE INCONVENIENCED BY FLIGHT DELAYS, CABIN SERICE RANGING -- OFTEN ON SAME FLIGHT -- FROM ABOVE-AVERAGE TO ATROCIOUS, CARDBOARD FOOD, NO PROVISIONS OF UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 ACCRA 00389 191243Z

SERVICE TAKEN FOR GRANTED ON OTHER AIRLINES (E.G., SEAT RESERVATIONS OF LFIGHT ORIGINATING AT POINTS PRIOR TO BOARDING STATION), AND RELUCTANCE AND NOT INFREQUENTLY FAILURE TO MAKE HOTE RESERVATIONS (EVEN AT PANAM'S OWN INTERCONTINENTALS).

3. PANAM MANAGER ACCRA TOOK UP DUTIES EARLY 1976, IS

PERSONALLY FRIENDLY, AND ATTEMPTS TO BE HELPFUL TO MISSION. HOWEVER, HE INHERITED YEARS OF MISMANAGEMENT, AND HIS COOPERATION HAS NOT YET EXTENDED TO POINT OF COMPENSATING FOR INADEQUATELY TRAINED LOCAL STAFF AND DIFFICULT OPERATING CONDITIONS. (WE NOTE HE SENDING THREE OF HIS PEOPLE SOON TO PANAM TRAINING CENTER.) REFTEL A REQUESTED DEPARTMENT TO DISCUSS POSSIBILITY WITH PANAM OF LATTER'S PROVIDING THIS MISSION (WHICH BY FAR LARGEST LOCAL PANAM CUSTOMER) PART-TIME BOOKING CLERK TO WORK MORNINGS ON MISSION PREMISES.

4. DESPITE EXCELLENT GOODWILL BY MANAGER, MISSION HAS HAD REPEATED PROBLEMS WITH FARE CONSTRUCTION BY PANAM, IN SOME INSTANCES COSTING MISSION MEMBERS SEVERAL HUNDRED DOLLAR OUT-OF-POCKET. ALSO, THERE HAVE BEEN SUCH MAJOR PROBLEMS IN OBTAINING TICKETS AND RESERVATIONS ON NON-PANAM FLIGHTS THAT EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 1976 MISSION BEGAN ISSUING ALL TRAVEL REQUESTS (EXCEPT THOSE FOR WHICH PANAM IS ORIGINATING CARRIER) TO TWA'S GENERAL SALES AGENT, BRITISH CALEDONIAN. EXPERIENCE THUS FAR WITH LATTER FAR MORE SATISFACTORY THAN WITH PANAM.

5. U.S. OFFICIAL TRAVELLERS HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO USE PANAM WHEN POSSIBLE, AND PANAM PERSONNEL UP AND DOWN THE LINE SEEM TO REFLECT THIS IN THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD SUCH PASSENGERS. BUSINESS TRAVELLERS AND OTHER NATIONALS ARE UNDER NO SUCH CONSTRAINTS. MANY HAVE SOUGHT OUT EMPLOYERS TO STATE CATEGORICALLY THAT THEY WILL NOT TRAVEL PANAM UNLESS FORCED BY SCHEDULE, PREFERRING TO USE EUROPEAN

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 ACCRA 00389 191243Z

AIRLINES VIA EUROPE, EVEN THOUGH INVOLVING EXTRA TRAVEL TIME. ONE WEALTHY NON-AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN, FREQUENT TRAVELLER, SAID PANAM'S FIRST CLASS SERVICE WELL BELOW OTHER AIRLINES' ECONOMY STANDARDS, AND SWORE NEVER TO GO PANAM AGAIN. A U.S. BUSINESSMAN SAID "PANAM IS MY SECOND CHOICE AIRLINE; FIRST CHOICE IS WHOEVER ELSE FLIES THERE." ON OTHER OCCASION, A COMMISSIONER (MINISTER) TOLD FORMER AMBASSADOR BLACK THAT HIS MINISTRY'S PEOPLE CONSISTENTLY CLAIMED THEY RECEIVED SUCH POOR SERVICE FROM PANAM ON GROUND AND IN THE AIR THAT THEY REFUSED TO TRAVEL PANAM ANYMORE.

6. APPARENTLY PANAM CONFIRMS UP TO 25 PERCENT MORE SEATS THAN AVAILABLE ON FLIGHTS, ON BASIS OF NO-SHOW EXPERIENCE. HOWEVER, AT BUSY TRAVEL TIMES LIKE CHRISTMAS/NEW YEARS THIS EXPERIENCE FACTOR INAPPLICABLE, AND WE END UP WITH SITUATION LIKE PA 185 ON JAN 3 WHERE SEVERAL OF MISSION'S CONFIRMED PASSENGERS HAD DIFFICULTY GETTING ACCESS TO AIRCRAFT AND SOME OTHER "CONFIRMED" PASSENGERS DENIED SEATS.

EXPERIENCE WITH FLIGHTS ON OTHER AIRLINES USING RESERVATIONS MADE THROUGH PANAM MUCH WORSE, WITH FREQUENT DENIAL OF BOARDING TO "CONFIRMED" PASSENGERS WHO DO NOT APPEAR ON MANIFESTS. HOWEVER, THIS IS ENDEMIC IN WEST AFRICA AND MAY AS EASILY BE LAID AT DOOR OF OTHER CARRIER AS AT PANAM'S.
SMITH

NOTE BY OCT: #AS RECEIVED.

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